

## **CALIFORNIA, UK SPONSOR GATHERING OF STEM CELL SCIENTISTS Stem Cell Leaders Foster International Collaboration**

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**SAN FRANCISCO, CA and LONDON** – Scientists from California and the United Kingdom will meet later this month to discuss the self-renewal and differentiation of stem cells, with an eye towards fostering international collaborations to advance the field of stem cell research.

The meeting is being organized by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), both of the UK, and the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM). It will be held November 13-14, 2006, in Worcestershire in the UK.

Thirty-two scientists will participate – 16 from the UK, 16 from California – and were invited on the basis of their research investigating mechanisms that cause stem cells to differentiate along particular pathways. Each delegation is composed equally of senior and junior faculty-level researchers.

Following the scientific meeting in the UK, CIRM officials will meet with Lord David Sainsbury, the UK Government Minister for Science and Innovation, to discuss ways in which the UK and California can work together on stem cell research. Produce skilled researchers. Advance and disseminate knowledge and technology to improve the quality of life and economic competitiveness of the UK. Promote dialogue with the public about medical research.

Professor Colin Blakemore, Chief Executive Officer of the UK Medical Research Council, said "We are delighted to have this opportunity for scientists from the UK to get together with colleagues from California to share experiences of creating, growing and using stem cell lines, and especially the crucial issue of how to persuade stem cells to transform into different kinds of mature cells. Understanding that process will be crucial for the eventual application of stem cells in new medical treatments. This is an exciting time for stem cell research. The scientific opportunities are enormous, but so are the challenges. It is crucial that researchers in this field around the world are given the chance to collaborate. The MRC has worked to establish the International Stem Cell Forum, now with 19 member organisations, and the UK Stem Cell Bank, which offers support for researchers around the world."

"The UK is a global center for stem cell research," said Zach W. Hall, Ph.D., CIRM's President and Chief Scientific Officer. "UK scientists are at the forefront of this new field and we hope to find opportunities for collaboration. The UK led the way in establishing medical and ethical standards for stem cell research which have been very helpful to us in developing the standards, practices, and policies governing stem cell work in California."

Hall and Dr. Arlene Chiu, CIRM Director of Scientific Activities, plan to meet with the London Regenerative Medicine Network, and may also visit the UK Stem Cell Bank, the world's first dedicated global repository for embryonic, fetal, and adult stem cell lines. The bank opened in 2002 and has accepted 40 cell lines, half from the UK, 17 from Harvard University and three from Australia. Just last month the UK Stem Cell Bank began distributing 4 embryonic stem cell lines to the scientific community. More stem cell lines for distribution are to follow in the coming weeks. "We want to better understand how the UK Bank manages new lines it receives, characterizes and accredits them, and then makes them available to scientists in the UK and abroad," said Hall.

Leaders of the UK Stem Cell Bank will come to the United States next February, holding workshops in Boston, New York, Madison, Wisconsin, and San Francisco, to educate U.S. researchers on the bank's operations and intellectual property policies. (CIRM and the British Consulate General, San Francisco will co-host the San Francisco session.) A second meeting of UK and California scientists is also planned for 2007.

This past January, CIRM was invited to join the International Stem Cell Forum (ISCF), an invitation facilitated by the MRC. The ISCF, a prestigious organization of national stem cell research institutions from 17 countries, promotes the harmonization of standards for sharing stem cell lines and encourages collaborative research across national boundaries. CIRM is the only state government agency invited to join the ISCF. The ISCF is chaired by Professor Blakemore.

### **About the MRC**

The Medical Research Council (MRC) is a publicly-funded organisation dedicated to improving human health. It supports research across the entire spectrum of medical sciences, in universities and hospitals, in its own network of units and institutes to improve human health through world-class medical research. It supports research across the biomedical spectrum, from fundamental lab-based science to clinical trials, and in all major disease areas. It works closely with the National Health Service and the UK Health Departments, and gives a high priority to research that is likely to make a real difference to clinical practice and the health of the population.

The MRC's mission, as set out in its Royal Charter, is to:

- Encourage and support research to improve human health.
- Produce skilled researchers.
- Advance and disseminate knowledge and technology to improve the quality of life and economic competitiveness of the UK.
- Promote dialogue with the public about medical research.

## About the BBSRC

The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) is the UK's principal funder of basic and strategic biological research. To deliver its mission, BBSRC supports research and research training in universities and research centres throughout the UK, including BBSRC -sponsored institutes; and promotes knowledge transfer from research to applications in business, industry and policy, and public engagement in the biosciences.

BBSRC, a non-departmental public body, is one of eight Research Councils supported through the Science Budget by the Department of Trade and Industry via the Office of Science and Innovation. BBSRC was established by Royal Charter in 1994 by incorporation of the former Agricultural and Food Research Council with the biotechnology and biological sciences programmes of the former Science and Engineering Research Council.

BBSRC invests around £336 million per annum in the biosciences and funds research in some of the most exciting areas of contemporary science, including:

- Genomics, stem cell biology, and bionanotechnology, that provide a basis for new technologies in healthcare, food safety, plant and livestock breeding, and bioprocessing
- Whole organism biology relevant to our understanding of diet and health, ageing, animal health and welfare, infectious diseases and immunity, and crop productivity
- Biological populations and systems that underpin agricultural sustainability, biodiversity and novel bio-based and renewable processes for energy and manufacturing

## About CIRM

The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) is a state government agency created in 2004, to award \$3 billion in bond funds to investigators at California universities and research institutions for stem cell research.

The research funded by CIRM will focus on basic science, patient and disease-specific stem cell research and other vital research opportunities for the development of life-saving regenerative medical treatments and therapies. All proposals are peer-reviewed to support the most promising scientific research. Research grants are made only to California-based research projects.

California has not yet issued stem cell research bonds, due to litigation challenging the constitutionality of the Act. That litigation is expected to conclude in the latter half of 2007. In the meantime, CIRM has funded training grants to 16 California research institutions through the sale of bond anticipation notes (BANs) to private philanthropists, and is preparing to award its first research and facilities grants in early 2007 through a \$150 million loan authorized by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The Institute is governed by the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee (ICOC), a 29-member board composed of the Chancellors of the University of California system with medical schools; leaders of other universities and medical research institutions within the state; leaders of California disease advocacy groups; and experts in the development of medical therapies from the life sciences community.

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